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A Spiritual Experiment

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I got the idea for *The Jesus Experiment* several years ago while writing a book based on the leadership style of Jesus. After completing the manuscript, I knew I had overlooked something significant. All of my research hadn't turned up what I sensed was the most important piece of the puzzle.

In What Ways?

And then I asked myself: *In what ways do I want to be like Christ?*

That's when it dawned on me that if I want to be like Jesus, I need to *feel*, *think*, *speak*, and *act* like him--as a devoted disciple. It's not that I want to change my personality or become another person. Instead, I want my feelings, thoughts, words, and deeds to be so guided by him that I experience the abundant life he offers.

We see the concept of discipleship in other relationships. For instance, all three of my sons are writers. From their youth, I've coached them and edited their work. Each one is currently writing a book. When they send me pages to read, nothing encourages me more than to see how they've grown as writers. I often recognize myself in their word choices, the cadence of their prose, and their humor--or attempts at humor. I am their teacher and they are my disciples. As writers, they want to be like me, while developing their own voice.

As disciples of Jesus, we want to be like him. We want his life and teaching to shape us so our lives reflect his. We want others to hear in our words and see in our deeds the life of our Teacher and Lord. To facilitate that kind of life, we need something that will enable us to put into practice what we know and are learning about Jesus.

Yet we always face the same, shadowy opposing force: Fear.

Fear

Before I began writing *The Jesus Experiment*, it was only an idea. I had nothing to fear because it required nothing of me. I could sit around my office, pondering the concepts and stories. But when I decided to write the book, I realized I would first have to *live* the experiment. There would be no room for philosophical musings. I would have to set up the lab, run the test, and evaluate the results ... in my own life.

What if it doesn't work? What if I don't complete it? What if I fail? What if Jesus' claim fails?

Like Bungee Jumping

I had never had second thoughts about writing a book. It reminded me of my desire to bungee jump. I've openly told friends, family members, and readers of one of my books that I'd like to leap from a bridge and experience the exhilaration of free-falling fast and far and then feel the bungee cord slow my descent before it launched me up

with even greater velocity.

Just the thought triggers a mild adrenaline rush. But knowing I want to bungee jump doesn't scare me. Not until a friend actually takes up my offer to go bungee jumping, and we set a date, will I be afraid and have second thoughts.

Comfortable With the Status Quo

Part of the reason *The Jesus Experiment* concerned me is because I knew it would quickly expose how unlike Jesus I am. Though I desire to be more like Christ, my human tendency to remain stuck is strong. Like everyone else, I'm comfortable with the status quo.

I have attitudes, habits, and ways of speaking and acting that give me pleasure and calm my nerves--almost like pacifiers--and I don't want to let go. My fear of rejection and shame prevent me from going into more detail here, and it's this tendency to cover up that reminds me, even as I write these words, that I am still very much *un*like Jesus.

But that doesn't mean *The Jesus Experiment* wouldn't work. It only means I have to confront my fears and remind myself of Jesus' promise to give abundant life. If you're feeling similarly apprehensive, I understand; but don't let that hold you back.

A Lifelong Pursuit

Let's face it, becoming like Christ is a lifelong pursuit, and something we won't fully attain until he appears and we see him as he is (1 John 3:2). But in the meantime, we can be moving in the right direction, and God can accomplish powerful, transformative change in our lives. It all starts with a simple desire to become more like Jesus, and a willingness to live the experiment.

From *The Jesus Experiment* due release in October, 2011.